

Germany prepares for bitter election

BONN, West Germany (Reuters) — West German President Karl Carstens will announce this week whether he has decided to dissolve the parliament and call a general election on March 6, but the campaign is already in full swing.

All four major political parties expect Carstens to agree to a dissolution, despite constitutional doubts about the contrived parliamentary confidence vote which Chancellor Helmut Kohl deliberately lost last month to make elections possible.

The first campaign posters are already on the streets, slogans are being rehearsed and politicians are exchanging the kind of insults that presage a bitter contest.

The March election is seen by opinion researchers as one of the most unpredictable elections in recent West German history.

There have been major shifts in the electorate since Kohl, a Christian Democrat, toppled Social Democratic Chancellor Helmut Schmidt in a parliamentary maneuver last Oct. 1.

"The mood is polarized, emotional and volatile. Nobody can forecast reliably if there will be two, three or four parties in parliament after March 6 and who will be in power," one analyst at the Infas opinion research institute said.

Kohl's center-right government, taking office after 13 years of left-liberal rule, enjoyed no political honeymoon.

Galvanized by anger at Schmidt's removal, the Social Democrats rebounded to score impressive results in three state polls and seem highly motivated for the general election.

Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher's Free Democrats, whose switch of allegiances brought Kohl to power, slumped to disastrous results in those polls and now face an uphill battle for political survival in the March vote.

The Christian Democrats (CDU) and their Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), riding high on a tide of discontent with the previous government, have begun to lose momentum as the burdens of office weigh on their shoulders.

And the radical ecologist "Greens," who have surged into six state assemblies, are hovering just above the 5 percent needed to take seats in Bonn for the first time.

Kohl is confident he will be re-elected, with or without his Free Democratic (FDP) coalition partners.

But opinion pollsters say there is at least a chance of a hung parliament in which the Greens, who oppose atomic power and nuclear missiles, would hold the balance of power.

Kohl hopes to pin the blame for West Germany's rapidly rising unemployment on the "heavy legacy" inherited from the Social Democrats.

His party is warning voters of the danger of "red-green chaos" if they elect a deadlocked parliament — an argument it hopes will scare middle-of-the-road citizens into voting CDU.

The SPD plans to remind voters of Genscher's "treachery" in bringing down Schmidt, still West Germany's best-loved politician, while accusing the new government of redistributing wealth from the poor to the rich.

Economic policy and the fight against unemployment, which could reach 2.5 million or 11 percent of the work force by election day, seem certain to be the top issues.

Kohl says the recession was brought on by the tax and welfare heaped upon industry by his Social Democratic predecessors and the answer is to create conditions in which private enterprise will invest and prosper again.

Another key election issue is the prospect of deployment of new U.S. medium-range nuclear missiles in West Germany later this year unless Moscow and Washington agree on arms control.

Kohl and Genscher, convinced that the vast majority of West Germans back NATO policy, intend to ask voters for a mandate to station the U.S. missiles unless the Soviet Union agrees to scrap all its medium-range weapons.

DOMESTIC

Meets With Reagan

By John M. Goshko

Washington Post Staff Writer

West Germany's opposition leader Hans-Jochen Vogel met with President Reagan yesterday and said later that it would be very hard for any chancellor to approve the planned deployment of medium-range nuclear missiles there in the absence of progress in arms control without creating major divisions within the West German public.

Vogel said he had sought to impress these problems on Reagan during their talks. He added that he regards the U.S. bargaining position at the arms control negotiations in Geneva—Reagan's "zero option" plan to bar U.S. and Soviet medium-range missiles from the European theater—as "an initial position" that almost certainly will have to be modified if an accord is to be reached.

He also said that, while Reagan had not told him so specifically, he received the impression here that the United States has "made no final decisions" about the talks and that "bargaining flexibility is possible" in the U.S. position.

At a luncheon with staff members of The Washington Post, Vogel said he stressed to Reagan the growing fear in West Germany and Western Europe of a nuclear holocaust and emphasized the need for success at the talks in Geneva.

Vogel and aides stressed that the situation in West Germany could become extremely tense this spring when preparations begin for deployment of the missiles. There has been widespread speculation that the site preparation and movement of equipment for the deployment could spark violent opposition to the plans.

At the Post, Vogel said that if the elections scheduled for March result in his becoming chancellor, his position on the scheduled missile deployment will be determined by his party's assessment of how serious Washington and Moscow have been in their efforts to reach an agreement.

"I don't exclude that we will have to agree to deployment if the Soviets don't move at all and if the Americans negotiate sincerely and flexibly," he said. But, "our first option is an agreement that makes it unnecessary to deploy the missiles."

That was a reference to the two-track strategy adopted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization calling for going ahead with plans to begin deployment this year, while seeking an agreement that would reduce substantially Moscow's arsenal of medium-range missiles in exchange for canceling the NATO deployment.

That approach was approved by chancellor Helmut Schmidt, who preceded Vogel as Social Democratic leader, but opposition to deployment—even in the party—has made the matter an increasingly emotional issue.

Schmidt stepped down and the present Christian Democratic government has continued to support the original two-track approach.

The Social Democrats, after picking Vogel to succeed Schmidt last month, said that this fall the party's executive board will reassess the status of the Geneva negotiations and, on the basis of how members read U.S. and Soviet intentions, decide